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SUBJECT: NO SHORT TERM DELIVERIES FROM CHAVEZ'S RUSSIAN
ARMS DEAL

Classified By: Political Counselor Robin D. Meyer
for Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced September 13 that he had agreed to purchase USD 2.2 billion worth of weapons from Russia. Russia reportedly is providing financing for this purchase. The weapons would include main battle tanks (MBTs), components of an integrated air defense system (IADS) and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). The time required for production, shipping, assembly, training and deployment would indicate at least 12-18 months before any of these systems entered into service. Even if never concluded, the announcement has the effect of demonstrating to the Venezuelan military his commitment to them, showing that Venezuela has allies, defying the United States, and disturbing the Colombians. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During the September 13 broadcast of his Sunday talkshow "Alo Presidente," President Chavez described his agreement with Russia to purchase of 92 T-72 MBTs and components of an IADS for a "hedgehog" strategy that would possibly include the BUK-2, the S-125 Pechora, the Antey 2500, the S-300, and the BM-30 Smerch MLRS. Chavez said these new weapons "would lift the morale" of the Venezuelan soldier and that the training would take place in Russia. Chavez also said the Russian government had "approved financing" of 2.2 billion dollars to allow Venezuela to make the purchase. Neither government has made public the financial terms of the deal.

BACKGROUND: PRIOR ARMS DEALS CAME UP EMPTY

¶3. (SBU) Prior to his 2008 trip to Moscow, Chavez extolled the abilities of the 2S25 SPRUT-SD, a light-weight Russian assault tank he planned on purchasing during the trip. By August, no mention of arms deals had been made and by the end of the month Chavez was publicly praising his armor officers for their hard work refurbishing their 1970's vintage French tanks. This created rumors that Russia had cut off Venezuela's credit for arms purchases. For over 12 months press reports from both Moscow and Caracas foretold the purchase of between three and nine KILO class submarines. Similarly, twelve IL-76 and IL-78 heavy cargo planes reportedly sold in 2007 have yet to appear.

COMMENT

¶4. (C) Chavez often confuses details of weapons systems or combines them with hyperbole. For example, Chavez said in 2008 he would press the button launching an air to surface missile from an Su-30 jet as part of exercise Armada Socialista, even though the aircraft are single seat

fighters. However, even if the details are accurate, taking into account production time, shipping from Russia, assembly in Venezuela, certification tests and deployment to active duty units, it could take a minimum of 12 - 18 months before the weapon systems are in service. Additionally, the Venezuelans will have to train and develop doctrine for the employment of these systems. The lack of command, control and communication systems will diminish the capability of integrating the weapons systems to achieve an effective air defense. End Comment.

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